

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, to welcome us back this morning the Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton.

SECRETARY NORTON: Good morning, everyone. I hope that you are enjoying this first White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation from the 21st Century as much as I am. We're all here today talking about successes while we're enjoying safety and comfort but our thoughts are with the people on the Gulf Coast who are experiencing such devastation and such loss. We all hope that they are going to see some rescue and some change for the better in their situation today.

Yesterday what we saw there, the conservation partnerships all throughout this room and across this nation are improving our environment in a profound manner. I'm excited by what I saw at the breakout sessions yesterday, the incredible diversity of what you were accomplishing, everything from growing wine grapes in a way that takes into account tiger salamanders to rescuing coral reefs in Hawaii.

I was impressed by our collective experience that so many of you have been involved in overcoming obstacles, in finding solutions, in seemingly endless debates. We want to learn from what you have accomplished and we tremendously look forward today to hearing your ideas and your input so that we can strengthen this process for the future.

Today we consider the way forward. But before we do so, it is important to look at the past. We stand at a point of transition here in this Gateway City. Before us is a new century of greatness. Behind us is a century of unprecedented progress in conservation.

Almost 100 years ago, Theodore Roosevelt laid the foundation for future conservation efforts with the first White House Conference on Conservation. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson followed with similar conferences. Each of those presidents and all of those who participated in the conferences they called left us the proud legacy of a beautiful and productive nation. Today having met the call of President Bush, we are poised to increase that legacy through cooperative efforts.

But as we look to the future, let us remember the past. That is the purpose of the presentation we are about to watch. It is designed to remind us how far we have come. The legacy of stewardship that is ours to renew. So let's begin this morning with our eyes to the future and with our footsteps planted firmly on the progress of the past.